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# The Atonement

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## Preface

*This study of the atonement, while dealing with theory, has mainly a practical aim. It is due to the conviction that the gracious truth in the doctrine has often been hidden from us by theological theories which, while well-meant, are really confusing or misleading. Further, while many of these theories are antiquated or greatly modified in most theological circles, their echoes remain in popular religious thought, and trouble many minds which have not learned to distinguish between the Christian fact and the theological theory. Thus the doctrine of Divine*

*Grace itself becomes a stumbling-block and offense unto many. To help such minds, not to instruct theologians, is the aim of this study. It is not offered as a treatise on the subject, but rather as a series of thoughts on the atonement.*

BORDEN P. BOWNE.

*February, 1900.*



## The Atonement

THE Christian Church has always held that a great work of Divine grace has been wrought for the salvation of men. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "Ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." "He loved us and gave himself for us." Such passages set forth the work of love; and because of this work the forgiveness of sins is promised unto

all those who turn to God in repentance and faith. Apart from metaphor and theory, the sum of the matter is a work of supreme and infinite love on the part of God for the blessing of men.

But assuming the reality of such a work, the question arises, How shall it be expressed and made accessible to our minds? A little reflection convinces us that there must always be something transcendental in the divine life and activity to which our earth-born thought, and especially our "matter-molded" forms of speech can only approximate. Thought itself has its parallax with reality when dealing with these high themes; and even when we are sure we have the right conception, we see it vanishing into mystery on the farther side. Such conceptions are of the nature of limits to which we must

approximate, but can not fully attain. Approached from the side of experience we see their necessity; but when we take them abstractly and absolutely, and reflect upon them in their metaphysical possibility, we soon find ourselves wandering in "endless mazes lost." Conceptions of this type are clear only from the side of the facts; if we attempt to approach them from the farther side, or by the way of deductive speculation, we only delude and confuse ourselves.

We may illustrate our meaning by our conception of the divine life and consciousness. When we attempt to construe our experience of the inner and outer world, we are shut up to the affirmation of an absolute and intelligent cause as their only adequate source. But as soon as we seek to construe this cause in its inner life, we find mysteries thronging upon us. We

have to affirm an unbegun life of tideless fullness, of unchanging self-possession, a life transcending time, and subject to no spatial limitations. How mysterious this is! Our own life of spatial and temporal limitation furnishes a very inadequate key; and we have to be constantly on our guard against transferring to that life conceptions born of our own limitations.

This illustrates what is meant by saying that thought itself has a parallax with reality which we must never forget. A further parallax is found in language, which is only an imperfect instrument for the expression of an already imperfect thought. All language for expressing spiritual things is necessarily based on metaphor. However spiritual the conception itself may be, it can find linguistic expression only through some

physical image or experience. All such language is literally false, but we use it in the hope that it will be taken, not for what it says, but for what it means. The process by which the mind passes from the metaphor to the meaning is one of the dark places of psychology and epistemology; but it is fundamental to all intellectual communion through linguistic or any symbolic expression.

This use of the physical to express the spiritual is especially prominent in religion and theology. Here we perpetually use language which we know to be literally false in the hope that it will be rightly understood. Thus we ascribe form and place to God, and speak of Jesus as sitting at the right hand of God. They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. God has a sword and arrows, and

flies upon the wings of the wind. Of course, no one would fancy that any objective fact corresponds to these utterances. Again, we often attribute psychological and even physiological experiences to God which are necessarily limited to the finite spirit. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. And it repented God that he had made man.

Of course, we do not object to the use of language of this kind. To be sure, there is a choice in metaphors, but metaphor of some sort is a necessity of religious speech. All that we can demand is that the metaphor, however impossible when literally taken, shall adumbrate a true conception or make a true impression. Nevertheless, these considerations show us that we must beware of taking our words as exact and lit-

eral statements of the truth, and we must even beware of taking our thoughts themselves as exhaustive and final conceptions of the truth. Thought has its element of relativity, and language needs more than the dictionary for its interpretation. Without a vital and spiritual process there is no possibility of understanding language, and there is hardly any absurdity which may not be evolved from language when the living soul is lacking. The letter always kills; only the spirit, the understanding, can profit.

So much for thought and language in general. It is further plain that, for setting forth the great truth of the Divine grace, it was necessary to use the actual speech and conceptions of the time. Any revelation which might be made to men must be cast in the existing molds of thought and

expression; otherwise it would be unintelligible. Accordingly we find the great salvation set forth in the language of ancient life and custom. In particular the religious rites and traditions of the age had produced a great system of thought and speech, and in terms of this system the doctrine of grace was naturally cast. The language of the altar and temple, the customs of ransom and redemption, the legal usages of the time, all lent themselves to its expression. Accordingly, Christ is a sacrifice and propitiation for our sins. He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. He is our pass-over. He gives his life a ransom for many, and thus becomes the Redeemer of the world. This language was necessary. The religious thought and development of the time would have been inac-



cessible to any other. Exact theological and speculative statement would have been unintelligible, or confusing and misleading, just as exact scientific statement would have been in the field of nature. Thus the language of the time is used; and for that time and for all times it makes a true impression; and Christian thought is left, under the guidance of the Spirit, to distinguish between the spirit and the letter, between the abiding truth and the changing form of its expression. As children must think in pictures and spatial forms, and only slowly pass beyond images to conceptions, or beyond pictures to meanings, so the entire race necessarily began its religious thinking in the picture and dramatic form, and only slowly and very imperfectly reached the form of conception and rational significance. We

must note the necessity of the early stages of this process, and also their temporary character. We must also note the practical nature of Scripture language, and its relativity to our present needs. It is becoming more and more apparent that the aim is to make a practically true and important impression, and that the language must not be taken in an absolute sense, as if it were the expression of a speculative finality. The truth is to be found in the impression rather than in any logical or dictionary analysis of the forms of speech; and the expression and understanding will vary with the growth of thought and life and knowledge.

The language of Scripture, then, has its pictorial, dramatic, metaphorical, and relative elements; but it is not to be set aside on that

account. We must rather seek to understand it in a free and living way, neither allowing ourselves to be intimidated by the dictionary, nor rejecting the language as meaningless. Metaphor is metaphor, indeed; but metaphor in all intelligent speech must have a meaning. How, then, is this language concerning the great salvation to be understood?

First of all, we may consider the general impression it makes, apart from any question as to its literal truth. And the thing which clearly appears when the matter is thus considered is a Divine work of condescending grace. We see the love of God in the gift of his Son, and the love of Christ in his work for us, and the gracious condition in which, as the result of that work, we find ourselves. The forgiveness of sins is proclaimed. The Divine

love is declared, and the Divine help is proffered to all. This is the clear revelation which emerges from these forms of speech; and this is a Divine gospel which is worthy of all acceptance.

So long as the language is thus viewed as an instrument, as a mode of putting the truth and making a true impression concerning the grace of God, it is permissible and useful so far and so long as it makes that impression. As just suggested, it was originally necessary, and it is by no means antiquated now. We may then recognize its value as a form of expression, and at the same time hold its purely instrumental character. We may hold that in another stage of moral and religious development these modes of speech would not be the best possible because the forms and customs on which they

rest have passed away. For instance, we may well believe that the Biblical forms of speech, while expressive and necessary for the time when they originated, would not be employed if the Christian teaching were to be set forth for the first time to-day: just as swords and arrows would not be used to represent the Divine weapons, or harps would not be the chief musical instrument of the saints. We can not doubt that the doctrine would be cast in modern molds rather than in those of the Jewish Church and the Roman law. There is no good reason for thinking that those ancient forms have an eternal fitness beyond all others for expressing the grace of God. We, then, who inherit them have to consider not so much what was said as what was meant, and to guard ourselves against a worship

of the letter which shall cause us to miss the spirit.

### The Atonement as Fact

The significance and expressiveness of these ancient forms of thought and speech are allowed when they are taken in a free and vital way, and are not reduced to literal statements of fact. But why may we not take them literally, and view them as exact statements of an objective process? For excellent reasons, which we now proceed to discuss.

But, first of all, and for the sake of clearness, we must make a distinction in order to avoid confusion. We distinguish between the fact and the philosophy of the atonement, or between the atonement as a fact and the theories of the atonement. By the atonement as fact we understand the gracious work of the Lord Jesus

for the blessing of men. All else is theory and mode of putting. And it is plain that one might well hold fast to the fact with all conviction and devotion, and at the same time find no acceptable theory. This is the case with many thoughtful Christians at present. In the religious life the fact is the effective thing and the abiding thing; the theory belongs to theology, and is by no means a constant quantity. The grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God which Jesus revealed are what moves men's hearts and compels devotion. The cross of the Lord Jesus was that in which alone Paul would glory, not the governmental or any other theory of the atonement. This acceptance of the fact is the sum of the matter with the great body of Christians, and it is all that is practically needed. It carries with it faith

in the love of God, and the forgiveness of sins, and all other benefits of the Savior's work. And it is conceivable that a Christian agnosticism should content itself with accepting the fact without any theory whatever. A Christian teacher who should simply proclaim the love of God and the self-sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on our behalf would proclaim the truth of the atonement far more effectively than another who should dwell on its philosophy. The former is intelligible even to the wayfaring man; the latter is not everybody's affair; indeed, in some of its forms, it would not seem to be anybody's affair.

The Scriptures themselves deal mainly with the fact, and give no single or consistent theory. The statements which seem theoretical are not harmonious with other statements by other writers or



even by the same writer ; and this shows that they are ways of putting rather than dogmatic finalities.

Let it, then, be clearly understood that the present discussion does not concern the fact of the atonement in the sense defined, but only the theory of it. The fact we affirm and insist upon ; the theory, which is a matter mainly of theological speculation, remains uncertain until now. With this understanding we return to the question whether the Scripture expressions concerning the work of Christ are to be literally taken.

The answer to this question is, No. They are expressions of the truth in terms of the thought and speech of the time, and as such are significant and expressive ; but when taken in any other sense they become incredible or im-

moral. This appears first in the fact that the Scriptures themselves have no single and consistent scheme of expression. This is sufficiently shown by the age-long debate among theologians on the subject. When such differing theories can be held, all appealing to Scripture, it is plain that the language is not to be absolutely taken, or that the Scriptures themselves are not clear and decisive in their teaching. In particular two incommensurable notions underlie the general New Testament exposition. One is the notion of substitution based on the sacrificial figures of the Old Testament, and the other is the notion of the imputed merits and righteousness of Christ whereby the believer is justified. These two conceptions are entirely disparate when taken literally, and can never be united in one homo-

geneous thought. They serve well to express the salvation wrought out by the Savior, and the safety in which the disciple exists because of the redeeming work; but if we take them in strict literalness we are forthwith lost. In general the New Testament writers, and especially Paul, were laboring to express the great salvation and the glorious liberty of the children of God thence resulting; and they availed themselves, as we have said, of all the customs, religious and social, which might serve for expression. If sin be thought of as a debt, it is paid. If it be thought of as a slavery, we are redeemed or ransomed. If it be thought of as guilt demanding atonement and propitiation and expiation, there has been one supreme sacrifice for sin. If we think of the mediating high priest of the old

Temple, we, too, have a Mediator and a High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has passed into the heavens, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. If we think of our guilt and unworthiness, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are accepted in the Beloved. This language springs naturally out of the customs and modes of thought of the time; and it is striking and expressive when taken as the language of devout emotion and adoring gratitude; but it is full of embarrassment when taken in rigid literalness. Much of it also is foreign to our modes of thought, and has to be translated into modern forms of conception before we can make much out of it.

Yet many persons, with little insight into the way in which living language is used, find it hard to distinguish between such

instrumental and adumbrative use of language and its falsehood. If the language does not mean what it says, they fancy it must be false. Yet how much of religious or other language means what it says? God is spoken of as a fortress, a dwelling-place of his people, as covering his saints with his feathers, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, while the righteous trust under his wings and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. All of these statements are literally false, and the various conceptions are mutually contradictory. Even the dullest can see this. Even the dullest perceives that the truth of such language lies in the idea it conveys, and that contradictory or incommensurable figures may be used to express the same truth. But fancy the result if any one should insist on taking this lan-

guage with mechanical literalness. We have similar absurdity or impossibility when we take with rigid literalness the Scripture language concerning the Savior's work.

The same impossibility is further seen from the progress of theological discussion concerning the atonement. The language of satisfaction, payment of debt, etc., has been universally abandoned in theory, or else so modified that it means something else. The latter is the more common course. This makes it possible to retain the language of Scripture and restrict it to a permissible meaning, which reduces to a contention for words rather than for ideas. But Antinomianism was seen to be the immediate and unavoidable conclusion when the language was literally taken. The debt

was paid or the penalty was exacted, and the sinner was, of course, free. The payment was demanded in the name of justice; and payment once made, justice could never demand or even permit that it be paid twice. The same conclusion resulted from the suppositions of substitution and satisfaction. Supposing these to be psychologically or morally conceivable, which is far from evident, it resulted at once that the sinner was unconditionally free. The suggestion of conditions whereby some sought to elude this conclusion did credit to their moral sense, but not to their logic. Such substitution in the nature of the case was in the indicative mood, and either was or was not the fact. If it was the fact, nothing either great or small remained for the sinner to do. But if something did remain, then it was not

a literal substitution or an absolute satisfaction, but something else, a substitution which did not substitute, a satisfaction which did not satisfy. With this result the doctrine became, as just said, a contention for words. It was thought necessary to *say* substitution and *say* satisfaction, but the meaning was left indefinite. The Antinomians, the holders of the unconditional perseverance of the saints, and the Calvinistic Universalists of the death-and-glory type, were the only logical defenders of the literal view; and even they did not duly consider the embarrassing fact that, in spite of the substitution, the saints are left to endure for themselves the visible consequences of sin; and this was well calculated to awaken the suspicion that perhaps the invisible consequences might come around to them also.



But the progress of theological thought, and the loud protest of the moral reason have compelled the abandonment of this theory in any literal sense. It is seen in its non-literal character.

Our Methodist and other Arminian writers have generally succeeded in making this point clear; and, as a consequence, the view of the atonement most in favor with us is some form of the governmental theory, and that in spite of the fact that the language of the Scriptures so largely lends itself to the abandoned views. This fact is interesting as showing the settled conviction that the language of Scripture must be interpreted in accordance with our moral reason, no matter what it seems to say. It also shows that, Methodistically at least, the problem is not one which can be solved by dictionaries

alone ; for the governmental theory is about the last thing the dictionary method would evolve from the text of Scripture. In fact, no theory departs more widely from the literal language of the Bible ; and its lawyer-like devices appeal neither to the heart nor to the conscience. Its non-literal character will clearly appear if we take almost any of the leading texts on this subject, and substitute the conceptions of the rectoral theory. Still it was a moral advance upon an immoral or impossible literalism. This general fact is especially commended to the consideration of all those Methodists who, not having mastered the distinction between the fact and the theory of the Savior's redeeming work, are prone to mistake a departure from the latter for a rejection of the spirit. No Methodist who un-

derstands his own position can ever be a literalist in this matter. There is all the more need of emphasizing this point from the fact that popular religious speech, and especially popular hymns, are saturated with substitutional and sacrificial literalism, and thus the idea is easily formed that this is the very gist and essence of the gospel. This error is inevitable to all who interpret religious speech as the language of a dogma or a statute.

There is, then, no literal substitution of one person for another, no literal satisfaction of the claims of justice, no literal payment of a debt, no literal ransom or redemption; but a work of grace on our behalf which may be more or less well described in these terms. One who has been saved from sin and restored to righteousness and the Divine favor may well think

of himself as redeemed and ransomed, or as freed from debts he could never pay. And he might also well and truly think of his Savior as having offered himself up as a sacrifice for him, as having died for him and redeemed him by his blood. But this is the language of emotion, and devotion, and gratitude, and discipleship. It is the language of the Christian heart and life, not the language of theological theory. To turn it into the mechanical letter of theory is to lose the spirit which alone giveth life. We have now to inquire into its theoretical and theological meaning.

### **The Atonement as Theory**

The theory of the atonement has largely been vitiated by two prominent mistakes. First, it has been discussed in terms of abstractions and in very general over-

sight of the concrete facts of the case; and, secondly, the relations of non-moral things have been substituted for the relations of moral persons.

The mass of the discussion illustrates the first point. Abstract notions of justice and government have been put forward as fundamental; and various statements have been made as to what they demand. Much of this work was done *ad hoc*, and represented no unsophisticated utterance of the moral reason. It was the work of advocates rather than of inquirers. The failure to understand the instrumental and adumbrative nature of language led to the fancy that every bold and striking metaphor was a literal fact; and the speculator had to conduct himself accordingly. This led to unlimited sophistication of reason and conscience. Justice

was defined as only a theologian could define it. The final cause of the definition was to work the theory and catch the sinner. The moral nature had few rights which theology was bound to respect. The claims of the Divine Sovereign were the supreme thing, and were determined in accordance with the political absolutism of the time. The Heavenly Father, the God of Love, nowhere appears. In his place was a Being very jealous for his own honor, and careful to exact the uttermost farthing. To be sure, the atonement was said to be the work of love, but in its philosophy love entirely disappeared. The entire operation was carried on in a fashion unpleasantly suggestive of an almighty Shylock. In addition, the makeshifts of human governments, which result solely from their imperfection, were taken as

models for our thought of the Divine procedure. Thus an indefinite amount of sophistication and moral hocus-pocus was introduced into the theory.

A brief sketch of the history of the discussion will illustrate this matter. Before the time of Anselm the theory of the atonement had not been elaborated. In the main, Scripture language was used, and in the early Church many fruitful glimpses of the positive and moral meaning of the Savior's work abound. Christ came not merely to remove the curse, but also to give men power to become the children of God. God became man that men should become divine. But these truths were only dimly seen, and were not freed from distorting misconceptions and elaborated into systematic expression before the collapse of the classical civilization.

There were some floating notions that the need of the atonement rested on the veracity of God ; and in cruder minds there was a fancy that the devil was a party to the transaction. He had acquired a right and title in man, it seems, by virtue of our sin ; and the work of redemption consisted in extinguishing this claim. This was often done in a rather doubtful fashion, which was excused, however, by the consideration that the devil deserved to be defrauded. All of this was definitely set aside by Anselm, who left out the devil entirely, and brought forward the justice of God as the Divine attribute which demanded a substitutional suffering for man, if he were to be redeemed. On this basis the theory was built up.

Sin, Anselm defines as the failure to give God his due. By sin a debt of indefinite magnitude is



incurred. God is defrauded of his due, which is especially the honor owed him by his creatures; and to be just to himself God must conserve this honor. This can be done only by the punishment of the sinner, or by a sufficient satisfaction for sin. Satisfaction for sin consists in restoring what the sinner has taken away, and in making due recompense for the dishonor of God arising from sin. Of course, man can never make this satisfaction, and hence arises the need of the God-man, who alone can bring salvation. Throughout the discussion three things are confused: the fact of the atonement, the theory of the atonement, and the theory of the person of the Redeemer. The subject is quantitatively and commercially conceived; and the entire discussion goes on so abstractly that neither God nor man,

as a moral being with moral ends, has much interest in the case. There is nothing in it that speaks clearly and convincingly to the consciousness and moral reason of any one. The abstract notions of justice, sin, satisfaction are shuffled and quantitatively measured against one another; and this is the true theory of the atonement.

In such crude notions the Christian philosophy of the atonement began; and it has been in unstable equilibrium ever since. How crudely it has been managed is familiar to every one acquainted with the history of Christian doctrine. Apart from the crude and unworthy conceptions of God and his government, borrowed from the undeveloped political and ethical philosophy of the time, justice was made into something abstract which demanded penalty or payment; and the penalty also

was made something so abstract that justice was quite indifferent who paid it, provided it was paid. Thus the thought was reached that justice might be satisfied by the pain of a second party; and in this way the possibility of atonement was secured. But, then, in order to retain a hold on the sinner, it was further held by all but the most rigorous logicians that the penalty already once exacted from the Redeemer might justly be exacted again from the sinner. Without this drawback the theory fell into Antinomianism; and with it, it fell into contradiction with itself.

Thus the theory is full of internal inconsistency. The atonement is said to be necessary to the forgiveness of sins; but, in truth, when the atonement is thus conceived, there is no forgiveness. To demand satisfaction, whether

by substitution or otherwise, is to collect the debt or inflict the penalty which in forgiveness is forgiven. But if the debt is paid, or the penalty is exacted, there is nothing to forgive. If, after such satisfaction, payment or penalty is still demanded, we have no forgiveness, but simply a trick whereby the debtor and his surety are defrauded, while the creditor gets paid twice. Not even faith could be demanded of the sinner on this scheme; for either the lack of faith as a sin is atoned for, or else something stands apart from the range of the atonement; and this, according to the theory, would be a fatal admission.

Thus forgiveness and even love itself disappear so far as the Father is concerned. The love is on the part of the Son; but the Father is simply satisfied by paying the debt, and has no further

claims. A recent religious publication contains a good illustration of this result. A preacher represents himself as having called on an old saint in obscure life, and as having asked her if she did not wonder at God's goodness in forgiving her sins. To his surprise she replied, No. This seemed to him to argue a great insensibility, and he set forth the Divine grace, and repeated his question. But once more the answer was, No. God, she said, was only just in forgiving her sins, since Jesus had taken her place, and paid it all. Then the preacher discerned, according to his own account, that he had been the dull one, and that the old saint had entered more deeply than he into the meaning of the Gospel. Such a ghastly travesty of the doctrine of grace is possible only to profound mental and moral illiteracy.

Equally confused was the traditional theory as to the relation of Christ to his work whereby he became the Savior of the world. Of course, there was a strong tendency to fix attention on the physical fact of death and its physical attendants as the supreme and essential thing; and this often ran into hysterical excesses from which we are not even yet entirely free. But, apart from these, we find in the exposition a continual oscillation between Christ as literal substitute, whose sufferings were a literal equivalent for the pains due from us for our sins, and Christ as having infinite merit, which makes us righteous by being transferred to us. The notions of merit and satisfaction having been distinguished, it became a puzzle to know how Christ could have any excess of merit which might be transferred to an-

other. The merit was supposed to arise from his perfect obedience; but then the query arose whether this obedience was not his duty, so that, after all, Christ did no more than his duty, and, hence, had no excess of merit to transfer. This scruple was met by the distinction of active and passive obedience. In the former Christ remained within the bounds of his obligation; but in the latter he transcended requirement, and this provided a store of merit which might be transferred. But the interpretation was not constant. Sometimes the passive obedience did away with our sin and guilt, and the active obedience secured for us the necessary merit. The double obedience became quite a labyrinth of barren subtleties. What the transfer of moral merit or moral character would mean in any case is,

of course, an insoluble question; but these mechanical thinkers gave little attention to this phase of the problem.

And just as little was the theory thought through with reference to God the Father. The theorists largely tended to make him the incarnation of justice, and as needing to be propitiated by sacrifice and suffering of some kind. This, as said, was often carried so far as to miss the love of God altogether, in the most flagrant contradiction of Scripture. The Father was full of wrath and vengeance, from which he was turned away only by the suffering and supplication of the Son. This notion crept into the creeds and popular hymns, and still appears in the cruder utterances of the pulpit. Thus the true order is inverted. The love of God to man is made the effect of the



atonement, whereas the Scriptures represent the atonement as the effect of the Father's love. God so loved the world that he gave his Son; God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself; and God in Christ, not God for Christ's sake, forgives us.

But when this error was avoided, and the Savior's work was seen to root and rise in the Father's love, it was exceedingly difficult to say in what the propitiation for sin consisted, or what necessity existed for it as any objective fact. Certainly the father of the prodigal son did not need to propitiate himself or to have any one else propitiate him when the repentant prodigal came home; and it is impossible to see any greater difficulty in God's pardon of men.

Equally obscure was the objective meaning of the propitiation made by the Son to the Fa-

ther. No one could tell what it meant when the matter was analyzed and clarified. Phrases and terms, some Scriptural and some not, abounded; but few cared to take them in strict literalness. They had to be explained or turned into mysteries before they could be adopted. On account of these difficulties the holders of the governmental theory abandoned the notion of a personal propitiation, and made it rectoral. But propitiation was a poor term for such a regent's device. It satisfied neither the language of Scripture nor the mind and conscience of the disciple. The truth is, the theorists were bent on saving the language, and failed to note its figurative and non-absolute character. To persons living in the midst of sacrificial customs and conceptions, the figure of propitiation would well set forth the re-

pentance and submission of the sinner, and the gracious disposition on the part of God; and this was the underlying truth, and the only truth we can find. If we insist on more, we must content ourselves with *saying* propitiation, without *meaning* anything beyond, possibly, the affirmation of an inscrutable and ineffable mystery; and that could be more directly expressed.

And, then, when the theory was at last adjusted, it still would not work. For the theory, such as it was, seemed to imply the removal of all the consequences of sin; and, unluckily, many of these visibly remained. In spite of the substitution, or satisfaction, or expiation, as we have said before, the saints, and even the elect, are left to endure for themselves the visible consequences of sin; and this is well calculated to awaken

the suspicion that the invisible consequences also may come around to them in the course of time. Thus the theory is seen to be mal-adjusted to reality. We may still insist on substitution and expiation; but we have to admit that it is a substitution which, so far as experience goes, does not substitute, and an expiation which does not expiate.

Thus the dialectic of these unrhymed notions appears. They are a tissue of inconsistencies arising from taking the free and living language of Scripture in a hard, mechanical fashion. And the notions themselves are taken in a non-natural sense. The abstract justice of this theory exists only in the theory. If justice demands anything, it is the punishment of the sinner himself. Only a mind debauched by theology would ever dream of calling any-

thing justice which contented itself with penalty, no matter who paid it; and only the same type of mind could tolerate a justice which demanded or permitted double payment. The worthy doctors who speculated in this way were in great straits. They thought that they must take Scripture language as dogma, and interpret it like a statute; and they felt that they must save their scheme from its immoral implications. This they sought to do by introducing the contradictory notion of a conditional satisfaction; which satisfaction became such by being called satisfaction.

Something of the same abstract and fictitious character appears in the governmental theory, inaugurated by Grotius, and variously elaborated since his time. According to this view, the diffi-

culty in forgiving sin does not lie in God himself as moral being, but in his rectoral relations as Governor of the universe. These complicate the matter and form the problem. God himself, as moral person, needs no propitiation, and justice is not incompatible with forgiveness. But as ruler, God must magnify the law and make it honorable. Hence the need of the atonement.

If we take this view abstractly, and interpret it in its own terms, we are still in the midst of confusion. The law must, indeed, be magnified and made honorable; but this can not be done in the forensic fashion which this theory proposes. In what way is the law magnified and made honorable by the suffering of an innocent person instead of the transgressor? In what way would such suffering reveal God's hatred of

sin or his love for sinners? Unless the problem be treated from the standpoint of vicarious love, such suffering would argue a blindness or indifference to moral distinctions which would be a source of terror rather than of confidence. Besides, the rectoral difficulty itself, when inspected, is found to be imaginary. It has been the rule to point out that human rulers can not forgive on simple repentance, and this has been thought decisive. But this is very superficial. Human governors must proceed by crude methods because of the impossibility of surely knowing the heart; but even here we are rapidly coming to see that when true reform is reached, neither government, nor society, nor morality has any interest in further punishment. The indeterminate sentence embodies this principle or

rests upon it. If a community were able to make its unrighteous members righteous, justice would be satisfied to let them go free. The real difficulty is not rectoral, but dynamic. Forgiveness upon repentance, with the limitations hereafter to be mentioned, is entirely in order. How to produce true moral repentance is the real problem.

Equally misinterpreted were the vicarious features of human life. The innocent suffer on account of the guilty, especially in rescuing them from the evil case into which they have fallen through the transgression of the laws of their being. But there is nothing in this of the nature of satisfaction, or substitution, or of an example which magnifies the law and makes it honorable. These facts fit only into the moral view of the atonement. Indeed,



it is clear that unless this question be transferred from the field of judicial abstractions to that of concrete moral relations, this rectoral theory is hopelessly bad; and with this transfer it passes over into the moral theory. Vicarious suffering of the kind just mentioned would be moral; but in any other sense it would reveal neither love, nor justice, nor morality of any permissible kind. This notion of an "example" for the sake of the law is even worse than that of a substitute. There is a kind of gloomy, tragic grandeur about the latter; but the former is merely a regent's device. It provides no satisfaction for sins committed or to be committed; it is only a kind of police measure to frighten off future transgression. The value of this theory consists in its revolt against the moral scandals and impossi-

bilities of the satisfaction doctrine whereby it became a step in theological progress. But in itself it is a half-way measure both exegetically and morally. Professor A. A. Hodge speaks of it as "a theatrical inculcation of principles which were not truly involved in the case."\* If grammars and lexicons are to settle the question, the rectoral theory is a heresy; and it was long so considered, and is so considered even now by a large part of the Christian world. A theory for whose enunciation we had to wait sixteen hundred years, and which is now rejected by great bodies of Christian thinkers, can hardly be reached by simply reading off the text. The language of Scripture is sacrificial, substitutional, and satisfactorial, and would sound strange

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\* Quoted by Dr. Munger in "Horace Bushnell," p. 242, note.

enough if it were translated into the terms of the rectoral theory. Not grammatical exegesis but the moral reason is the great source of the theory, and to satisfy this reason the theory must go further than it has gone. The reasons which produced it are carrying us beyond it.

These things illustrate the abstract method of discussing the atonement, and also warn us against it. By that method we reach only confusion, and lose sight of reason and conscience and reality altogether. It is equally dangerous to discuss it in terms of things, and not from the standpoint of moral persons. The difference is well illustrated by the following quotation from Coleridge :

“A sum of £1,000 is due from James to Peter, for which James

has given a bond. He is insolvent, and the bond is on the point of being put in suit against him, to James's utter ruin. At this point Matthew steps in, pays Peter the thousand pounds, and discharges the bond. In this case no man would hesitate to admit that a complete satisfaction had been made to Peter. Matthew's £1,000 is a perfect equivalent for the sum which James was bound to have paid, and which Peter had lent. It is the same thing, and this is altogether a question of things. Now, instead of James being indebted to Peter in a sum of money which (he having become insolvent) Matthew pays for him, let me put the case that James had been guilty of the basest and most hard-hearted ingratitude to a most worthy and affectionate mother, who had not only performed all the duties and ten-

der offices of a mother, but whose whole heart was bound up in this her only child, . . . all which he had repaid by neglect, desertion, and open profligacy. Here the mother stands in the relation of the creditor; and here, too, I will suppose the same generous friend to interfere, and to perform with the greatest tenderness and constancy all those duties of a grateful and affectionate son which James ought to have performed. Will this satisfy the mother's claims on James, or entitle him to her esteem, approbation, and blessing? Or what if Matthew, the vicarious son, should at length address her in words to this purpose: 'Now I trust you are appeased, and will be henceforward reconciled to James. I have satisfied all your claims on him. I have paid his debt in full; and you are too just to require the

same debt to be paid twice over. You will, therefore, regard him with the same complacency, receive him into your presence with the same love, as if there had been no difference between him and you. For I have made it up.' What other reply could the swelling heart of the mother dictate than this: 'O, misery! and is it possible that you are in league with my unnatural son to insult me? Must not the very necessity of your abandonment of your proper sphere form an additional evidence of his guilt? Must not the sense of your goodness teach me more fully to comprehend, more vividly to feel, the evil in him? Must not the contrast of your merits magnify his demerits in his mother's eye, and at once recall and embitter the conviction of the canker-worm in his soul?'"\*

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\* "Aids to Reflection," Aphorism XIV.

This passage shows how odious and abominable are the results when we discuss this doctrine in terms of things and apply them to the relations of moral persons ; and also how utterly impossible it is that any one should ever take another's place in his moral relations. It would be playing hide-and-seek with intelligence and conscience, a series of make-believes and false pretenses, a calling of black white and a pretending that it is white, when all the while it is black, and we know it is black. Turning a black man into a white man by putting a white robe on him would not be more fictitious. Such is the case with all notions of substitution, transfer of moral qualities, imputed righteousness, etc., when they are literally taken. Thus we see the necessity of considering the question from the standpoint of the moral personal-

ity. Abstractions are illusory and fictitious; and the relations of things are incommensurable with the relations of persons.

After so much of abstract and negative criticism, it seems well to remind ourselves of the distinction between the atonement as fact and the atonement as theory. We still believe and maintain that a great work of grace has been wrought for man; that the Father gave the Son to be the Savior of the world; that the Son loved us and gave himself for us; and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Our discussion concerns simply the theological theory of this work, and here we find much to be desired. The traditional theories have been an incongruous compound of inconsistent speculation and halting exegesis. The spec-



ulation was never rigorous, but was helped out by the exegesis; and the exegesis rested on the fancy that Scripture language is that of dogma, and must be interpreted like the words of a statute. Moreover, a good part of the exegesis consisted in reading the Scriptures in the light of the traditional dogma, thus often reading into them doctrines undreamed of by the Scripture writers themselves. A sufficient illustration is found in the fact already mentioned, the making God's love the effect of the atonement instead of its cause.

The total result was something about equally obnoxious to reason and conscience on the one hand, and to the Scriptures themselves on the other. The living revelation of the love of God, and the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the sanctifying work of the Holy

Spirit, which illumine the Scriptures, was replaced by frigid juristic speculations, lifeless and life-destroying, the despair of reason and the opprobrium of faith. And because of the failure to distinguish between the fact and the theory of the Savior's work, these speculations were thought to be the gospel itself. The only saving feature of the case was that, in spite of these obscuring mists of theory, the love of God nevertheless gleamed through the words of Scripture, and a wholesome moral instinct generally prevented the theory from working its logical results. The same moral instinct enforced the demand for righteousness, and thus supplemented the most grievous lack of the speculation. Meanwhile, and on the other hand, the critics of the traditional theory have often dissolved away both the love and

righteousness of God into a hazy good nature, with no power to awe or to attract. Both extremes are about equally far from the truth.

### The Atonement as a Moral Process

THE necessity of transferring the discussion of this doctrine from the realm of juristic abstractions to the realm of life and conscience has already appeared. Many hints of such a view appear in the writings of St. Paul, and since the time of Abélard there have been more or less definite attempts to construe the atonement as a moral process, having for its aim less the canceling of debts supposed to be due to justice than the positive lifting of men into the life of righteousness. This is certainly an aspect of the problem which Christian thought will never again

consent to lose sight of. It is the stone which the traditional builders have commonly rejected, whereas in the gradual moralizing of theology which Christian progress is bringing about, it is becoming the head of the corner. We have now to consider whether reflective criticism will allow us to rest in this view, or whether it must go along with the others.

And, first of all, it is plain that we must not only keep clear of abstractions, but we must also discuss the question with regard to our human conditions. We have no call to consider the relation of abstract government to abstract subjects, or what might be demanded in the government of angels, of whose nature and conditions we know nothing, or what penalty should be exacted for disobedience wrought in the full light

of knowledge, and because of pleasure in the evil. Discussed on that abstract basis, we should most probably come to the conclusion that there can be no forgiveness of sins, and that justice could never rest without exacting the full penalty from the sinner. But all such questions we set aside; for we really have neither the mental nor the moral insight needed for such discussion. What would be abstractly just in general is beyond us; we must confine ourselves to considering concrete cases. The atonement seems intelligible only in connection with a developing moral world, and would appear to be inadmissible in a completely developed moral order.

Moreover, our human life is not lived on the abstract plane of abstract moral agency. It is a life of ignorance and weakness; a life

of crude beginnings and shadowy incipencies; a life without insight into itself, and without foresight of the end; a life in which power and faculty and knowledge and moral sensibility and self-control have to be developed; a life rooted in the animal out of which we only slowly and by much trial and error emerge; a life largely molded by heredity and environment, and solicited by temptations from without and within, from above and beneath and around. Now, the application of abstract rec-toral and forensic notions to such a life is as absurd as it would be in the case of the family. Manifestly the only possibility of getting any conception of the case which will not revolt the moral reason lies in replacing the conception of the Divine Governor by that of the Heavenly Father, and the conception of the Divine

government by that of the Divine family. If the dearest and deepest thought of God be that he is our Father, then our deepest and truest thought of his dealings with us must be determined by this conception; and all other conceptions of whatever kind that will not harmonize with this must be cast out. Whatever notions of government and justice we may form must be subordinated to the thought of this Divine Fatherhood of which every other fatherhood in heaven or in earth is named. Instead, then, of a Divine Ruler anxious mainly for his own claims and laws, we have a Divine Father in the midst of his human family, bearing with his children, and seeking by all the discipline of love and law to build them into likeness to and fellowship with himself.

The primal demand for the

economy of grace lies in the form and nature of human development. These constitute a claim for fatherly patience, forbearance, and discipline. There could be no more ghastly travesty of justice and goodness than any abstract forensic procedure would offer. Theology long echoed the political absolutism of the time, and regarded God as an irresponsible ruler, whereas, from an ethical point of view, he is the most deeply obligated being in the universe. And having started a race under human conditions, he is bound to treat it in accordance with those conditions. God is bound to be the great Burden-bearer of our world because of his relations to men. We that are strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak, is a principle of unlimited application. All dealing with the moral problem



of humanity must regard our human circumstances.

Further, our development begins on a submoral plane. That was not first which was spiritual, but that which was animal (psychical), and afterward that which was spiritual. Whatever may have been true of the first man, this word of Paul's is true of his descendants; and the reported performances of even the first man would not seem to set him very high in the scale of development. By consequence, sin itself in many of its aspects is a relic of the animal not yet outgrown, a resultant of the mechanism of appetite and impulse and reflex action for which the proper inhibitions are not yet developed; and only slowly does it grow into a consciousness of itself as evil. Thus sin is born; that is, human beings become

willful and selfish, and willing to do wrong. This may, indeed, go to any extreme of malignity, but it would be hysteria to regard the common life of men as rooting in a conscious choice of unrighteousness.

Now, given sin in the sense defined, what is to be done? As said, it is conceivable that there should be orders of being, say first-born sons of light, with whom any sin would be fatal. But we need not concern ourselves about them. With us human beings the case is otherwise. Unless we suppose God to have made the world in the dark, we must allow that he foreknew and intended to have just this developing human world with its necessity for struggling out of the animal into the spiritual, out of the mechanical into the free, out of the selfish into the loving, out of the earthly

into the divine. It must be dealt with, therefore, under the law of development, and under the law of love. Hard-and-fast laws, mechanically imposed and mechanically applied, would be unspeakably absurd or unspeakably unjust in such an order. Tendencies, direction, outcomes, are the important thing; and judgment must come not at the beginning, but at the end.

This is something which formal ethics finds difficult; for this science delights in categorical imperatives and abstract relations, and finds it hard to adjust itself to a moving moral world; just as formal logic finds it hard to adjust itself to a moving physical world. In both cases, however, the adjustment has to be made. The human moral world does not exist as something fixed and complete; it is rather becoming. The

saints are not saved; they are being saved. The whereabouts of a developing being is not so important as the direction of his movement; and his moral standing depends not on single and isolated deeds, but on the character which he develops. And this admits of no mechanical and quantitative measure in any case.

We abandon, then, all theories of an abstract atonement based on abstract considerations of abstract moral agents and abstract transgression, and confine our attention to the concrete and living human world. Closet theories have no application or value. We are not concerned to find something which might be consistent as an abstract ethical speculation, but something which will commend itself to our moral reason when applied to this imper-

fect, developing, ignorant, and sinful human world. Such a doctrine must be sought in life and experience and the moral personality.

The primal attitude of God toward the human world, we have said, must be that of love in all the manifold expressions which our human life requires. But as this life develops into the moral form, the moral nature makes its demands. It is conceivable that God should have made a world capable only of sentient and non-moral satisfactions. The animal world seems to be of this kind. In such a world it suffices to furnish the conditions of animal development and comfort. But if a moral world is to exist, the moral nature must prescribe its form and imperative conditions. And one thing on which the moral

nature is categorical and unyielding is that moral good and moral evil shall not be treated alike. It would be the overthrow of the moral universe to hold that moral evil could ever be ignored as indifferent or treated as if it were good. Now, we are in the world of moral persons, and here we come upon a real moral difficulty which demands consideration, one which has formed the real strength of the theories of the atonement that have demanded some sort of satisfaction as a condition of forgiveness; although they failed rightly to apprehend the nature of the demand.

The essential moral fact in this matter is, that if God is to forgive unrighteous men, some way must be found of making them righteous. This difficulty is not forensic but moral. It does not spring from rectoral complica-

tions, but from the moral nature itself. To forgive wicked men while they remain wicked would be immoral. The fundamental problem is to find a way whereby the righteous God can make righteous the ungodly; and this can not be secured by calling or declaring them righteous, but only by a spiritual transformation. Some dim insight into this fact underlies the highly unclear traditional conceptions of the relation of justification to regeneration; and this fact misunderstood has been the real strength of the demand for some kind of satisfaction as a condition of forgiveness. With the tendency of uncritical thought to mistake distinctions for divisions, the several aspects of salvation have been made into separate processes, and an "order of salvation" has been laid down, to depart from which

would be heresy. Much of this trouble arose from viewing the subject from the judicial rather than the moral and vital standpoint. From the former, penalties are externally attached, and might be externally remitted; but from the latter, penalties are organically connected with life and conscience, and demand regeneration as well as absolution.

The problem, then, must be concretely considered, and from the human standpoint. And here, again, in order not to lose ourselves in abstractions, we must recur to the concrete life once more. We can not too resolutely keep to the world of actual experience. We observe, then, that our moral life is not something going on in a vacuum by itself and without relation to the system of law and reality. It is conceiva-



able that there should be a life with only abstract moral contents and adapted to an abstract moral probation. This is the kind of life which the abstract theorists seem to have in mind when they make theories of the atonement. But our life is altogether different. It roots in and grows out of the natural life of sense and impulse and desire; and it is geared throughout with the world of natural law and uniform sequence. The moral life abstractly considered deals only with will and motive; but the moral life concretely considered deals with the whole system of law and consequence besides. And the concrete moral life is the only reality; and its aim is not simply to be formally good, but to attain unto largeness and richness and fullness of life itself. The abstract moral form is but

the form; the contents are life, ever more abundant and glad and blessed.

This order of law and consequence exists as the foundation of our life. And this fact compels us to transfer the whole question of salvation from the realm of fictitious forensic abstractions and barren legalities to the realm of living natural and moral law. It is not a question of courts, but of life; not a question of abstract rules, but of the solid structure of reality. We have not to deal with arbitrary enactments, with penalties arbitrarily attached, but rather with constitutional law; that is, with law wrought into the constitution of things, and executing itself with the inevitability of gravitation. Any real solution of the problem must be sought from this point of view. We exchange, then, the forensic

standpoint of external enactments for that of organic law.

And this fact enables us to make another distinction of great importance for the understanding of this matter of forgiveness and salvation. The moral life is now seen to involve two elements: relations of will and a set of organic consequences. The two interpenetrate, but are nevertheless distinct. The former represents the attitude of the will; the latter is independent of volition, and represents the stored-up and incarnated outcome of conduct in the world of law. The existence and continuity of this order of law are absolutely necessary to any rational and moral system; and any tenable doctrine of forgiveness must be adjusted to it.

There is a great deal in this order of consequence which is mysterious to us. Why the conse-

quences of physical wrong-doing should be what they are is quite beyond us. The special forms and intensity of discord introduced into our faculties by sin, the peculiar weakening and depolarization of the moral nature itself resulting from conscious wickedness—all these points are involved in great obscurity. We must believe, however, that they are no random effects, but represent the moral judgment and wisdom of the Almighty.

We now return to the question of forgiveness. In the personal field evil-doing is followed by the displacence of moral beings, whether the deed be against ourselves or others. The attitude of the moral will is this personal displacence toward the offender. Forgiveness would mean the removal of this displacence and the restoration of the offender

to harmonious relations of will again. The condition of such forgiveness would be true repentance; that is, a heartfelt repudiation and condemnation of the deed, and a purpose to rectify the wrong done so far as possible. With God and man alike such repentance should remove personal displacence and restore the offender to harmonious relations of will with the one sinned against. There is nothing now in the attitude of his will which calls for condemnation. But this would not end the matter; for in the other field of law and outcome forgiveness does not cancel consequences. The spendthrift may be forgiven, but his property is gone. The abuse of health may be forgiven, but the broken constitution remains. No forgiveness, no pardon, can recall the wasted years, or bring back

the vanished opportunity, or make the past never to have been, or escape its entail of evil. Experience gives no hint of pardon such as this.

In this realm of constitutional law the utmost we may hope for is that consequences may be eliminated by bringing in other laws, as health eliminates disease. And in order to any effective forgiveness it is necessary that the system of law shall be such that restorative or countervailing agencies shall exist whereby the evil tendency may be prevented from becoming fatal, or from continuing forever. As provision is made in the physical system for restoring equilibrium when the disturbance is not too great; or as provision is made in the living organism for the elimination of disease within certain limits; so provision must be made in the

moral system for moral recovery. Otherwise there can be no moral system under human conditions. Without such provision the system would be in unstable equilibrium, and would be hopelessly overthrown at the first disturbance of its balance. In a forensic system, where penalty is externally attached, forgiveness might end the matter, but in an organic and vital system forgiveness is nothing without cure. What would the forgiveness of a self-induced fever mean?

We have, then, an unchangeable system of law, not forensic, but expressed in the nature of things, as the precondition of any moral and intelligible order. And this system must be looked upon as an expression of the Divine goodness and righteousness; and being such, it must be without variableness or shadow of turning.

No arbitrariness can be admitted here. Thus we come in sight of a fixed system of law to which all our conceptions of forgiveness have to be adjusted. And it would be more tolerable to the moral nature to deny outright the possibility of forgiveness than to allow this system to be tampered with in such a way as to treat good and evil alike, or to introduce arbitrariness into the Divine procedure.

And here is the truth, and the only truth, in the traditional philosophies of the atonement, the claim that sin itself can never be treated as a matter of indifference, and that its forgiveness can never be a subject of arbitrary volition. There are moral conditions to be regarded which are of absolute obligation. But while these philosophies have rightly held this truth, they have by no



means succeeded in rationally satisfying the demands in question. They have insisted that the consequences of sin can not be canceled without an atonement, but have signally failed to see that they are not canceled even with an atonement. Their occupation with fictitious forensic consequences has prevented their seeing the world of concrete consequences.

An opposite error of the sentimentalists must be noticed at this point as resting upon the same oversight of the system of organic consequences. We might well fancy, in some moment of moral relaxation or of half vision, that there ought to be absolute forgiveness upon repentance, with relaxation of all penalty. This notion would root in the nervous sensibility rather than in the moral reason. In the root sense

of the word, it would be pathological rather than moral. Its plausibility rests upon oversight of the distinction between forgiveness as the removal of personal displacence, and forgiveness as the canceling of natural organic consequences. The sentimentalist fails to see that consequences are not forgiven. He also fails to see that as God's laws are founded in love and wisdom, there can be no departure from them. There are conditions for everything in the Divine order, and a road to every place. If we wish the thing, we must fulfill the conditions. If we would reach the place, we must travel the road. We shall never get wheat by planting weeds; and just as little shall we reap to the Spirit if we sow to the flesh. Imagine the folly of one who should say, "I sowed weeds, but

I expect wheat; for I have repented since then, and I trust I shall have wheat when the time comes." Such is his folly who in a world of law expects to reap what he has not sown, or to escape from reaping what he has sown. It is God's purpose to have and to bless only a world wherein dwelleth righteousness. However inconvenient we may find it, and however strong our desire for sport may be, the unrighteous must come to grief; and God will never depart from his moral laws to make it otherwise. And let all the people say, Amen. It would be insufferable to suppose that God, having desired a holy world and failed to reach it, should then content himself with making the unholy happy.

Furthermore, the sentimentalist conceives repentance very superficially. In fact, true repent-

ance is so difficult and takes such deep hold on the moral nature that not without reason is repentance itself spoken of as the gift of God. Mere regret, especially in the face of penalty, is not moral at all; least of all is it any ground for forgiveness. The fear that haunts every thoughtful mind at this point is, that there will never be any truly moral repentance. The sorrow of the world is easy enough, but the godly sorrow that worketh a change of mind is not so easy nor so common. We may well believe that true repentance is followed by forgiveness, but the problem how to produce such repentance remains unsolved; and this is one of the greatest practical difficulties in the case.

This distinction between forgiveness as the removal of personal displacence and forgiveness

as the canceling of natural consequences deserves emphasis; for there are many crude and immoral notions in popular religious thought concerning what forgiveness does. These are illustrated by that odious fancy which one often comes upon in religious circles, that the best adjustment between this world and the next would be to sin as long as possible and repent just in time to escape the penalty. Such a notion has no warrant in experience, is odious to conscience, and is most unseemly in the face of unchanging law; and one holding this notion should consider that true repentance is thereby made impossible, and that forgiveness does not cancel consequences.

Notions of this kind spring from the abstract conception of the atonement. Sin is supposed to constitute an abstract debt to

abstract justice; and this debt is canceled by the atonement. The necessity of personal righteousness and the world of inflexible law are lost sight of; and these immoral fancies result. But they vanish forever when we view the subject from the concrete ethical standpoint. So long as any one wishes to be saved, not from sin but from the penalty of sin, there can be no salvation for him. He knows neither the Scriptures nor the moral reason. True salvation is from sin, not from penalty. Yet so inverted are our notions on this matter that a large part of religious effort seems to be directed to saving men from hell rather than from sinning, and to getting men to heaven instead of recovering them to holiness of heart and life—a frightful heresy in both faith and practice. It is even to be suspected that not a

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a little of popular zeal for the traditional views of the atonement rests at bottom on the secret fancy that in some way the atonement enables us to escape the stringent necessity of personal righteousness. In that case it is only a specification of the general mechanical tendency in religion whereby men seek to avoid the narrow way of spiritual life. Men are ready to believe and do anything which promises to absolve them from girding themselves for strenuous and holy living. To detect the presence of this tendency in this matter we need only ask ourselves what we really desire from God. Is it the forgiveness of sins, restoration to the Divine favor, and God's help in holy living? All of this is provided for by the gospel. But if it be anything else, as escape from consequences or relaxation of

moral demands, we are using the grace of God as a cloak for iniquity and an incitement to sin. This is the heresy of heresies. The love of God, like parental love, takes the will for the deed, bears with weakness and imperfection, avails itself of all the resources of discipline, and waits for development; but if any one regardeth iniquity in his heart, the wrath of God abideth on him; and any doctrine to the contrary is a heresy.

The sins of the world, then, may not be ignored; neither may they be taken away by mere sovereignty. The problem is a moral one, and must receive a moral solution. And the solution must be sought in accordance with God's fundamental purpose in our human world. That purpose is to have a family of spiritual



children, made in his image and likeness, who shall know him and love him, and upon whom he may bestow himself in blessing for ever and ever. And the method of procedure is that of growth and development. There are animal beginnings with moral endings. Love and law are omnipresent throughout the whole of the work; and judgment is possible only at the end.

God's supreme aim is to secure the love and obedience and sympathy and filial confidence of his children. On the human side the response is slow. As in the earthly family, there is a long period of irresponsiveness, ignorance, willfulness, and even of rebellion; and as the earthly father bears with this, waits for development, and seeks by all the resources of love and correction and discipline to bring the

child to the filial insight and the filial spirit, so the Heavenly Father bears with his children and seeks to bring them to a recognition of his presence and purpose in their lives, and to a filial acceptance of, and co-operation with, his purpose. They must be recovered from their willful and evil ways, from their distrust and alienation also, and given power to become the children of the Highest. Any work which did not secure this, which left men in their alienation and rebellion, might conceivably satisfy a fictitious justice; but it would never satisfy the Father's heart. To treat men as righteous when they are not righteous, would involve the deepest depths of mental and moral confusion. The only effective atonement for sin must consist in salvation from sin and restoration to righteousness.

Nothing else could satisfy God or man.

How, then, are the sins of the world to be taken away? This question in a forensic sense we dismiss altogether as being fictitious. In the practical sense the meaning is better expressed in another form: How are ignorant, weak, willful, sinful men to be recovered from unrighteousness and developed into the life of God? This is the real problem for which we must seek a concrete moral solution. Mere power can do nothing. Mere volition is inadmissible. It is either a moral solution or none. It is a question of moral goodness and of moral dynamics with which juristic abstractions have nothing to do.

Here comes in the work of Christ as a necessary part of the work of grace. God's supreme

resource must lie in himself and in the revelation of himself. God must be revealed as a moral being and in such a way as to make forever sure both his love and his holiness, and to furnish the supreme incentive to repentance and righteousness and love on the part of men. This is done by the incarnation of the Divine Son, who reveals the heart of the Father, not in word but in deed, so that God is manifest in the flesh for the salvation of men. And in the fullness of his devotion, the Divine Son enters into human limitations, lives the perfect life before men, shows God's thought for men, comes into contact with our sin also, submits to its outrage and violence, and becomes obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Now, two things are forever clear for all who receive this faith: first,

that God will never depart from his moral laws in order to make men happy or to save men in their sins. They must be saved morally if saved at all. Secondly, the love and grace of God are set on high forever; and now every one that thirsteth may take of the water of life. This is the specific meaning of the Redeemer's work. It was not a fictitious haggling with abstract and fictitious justice. It was Infinite Love going forth to seek and to save the lost. It was the father of the prodigal going in search of his boy. It was the Good Shepherd giving his life for the sheep; not, of course, at the demand of justice, but at the instance of Divine love. This is the true vicariousness of love, of sympathy, of the living moral reason, not an abstract and fictitious vicariousness which no one

can understand or find any place for in an unsophisticated conscience.

Thus the righteousness of God is set forth and forever demonstrated. If God were simply a being of good nature, and without interest in the righteousness of his creatures, he could easily make them happy by mere power and at no cost to himself or any one else. This is the sentimentalist's notion of what ought to be. This notion is forever vacated by the cross of Christ. God will be at infinite cost to save men, but he will save them morally or not at all. It is a moral world in which we live; and we are under the inexorable law of righteousness. There is no provision made for relaxing moral demands. The promised land is only for those who attain unto the spirit of righteousness. The willful and dis-

bedient may wander in the desert forever; they can not enter in. The only hope for sinners consists in their being saved from sinning. There is and can be no other salvation which the moral reason will accept. The work of Christ, as thus morally conceived, demonstrates, we repeat, the righteousness of God.

And not only is the righteous God thus revealed, but we also see God's great method for making righteous the ungodly. We see the revelation of righteousness, and we also see Divine love in Divine condescension and sacrifice in order to win men from unrighteousness and raise them to the righteous life, to do away with their estrangement and misunderstanding, and bring them into filial fellowship with their God and Father. This is the great meaning of the work of

Christ. In this way the righteousness of God is declared, and the just God becomes the justifier of the ungodly; that is, the righteous God helps the ungodly to become righteous. Thus God was and is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

Apart from the Christian revelation we should never have dreamed of such a work of grace. Our thought of God has been mainly determined by metaphysical considerations drawn from his absoluteness and infinitude; and our thought of his relations to us has been drawn mainly from political absolutism and earthly conceptions of greatness. By consequence the ethical factor has been very imperfectly treated. Indeed, except for purposes of punishment, God has hardly been a moral being at all. Built on the Epicurean model, and con-



cerned especially for his own claims, God was little more than a magnified mediæval ruler or Oriental despot. But now that the revelation has come, we see that something like this work of grace was a moral necessity with God. It was an awful responsibility that was taken when our human race was launched with its fearful possibilities of good and evil. God thereby put himself under infinite obligation to care for his human family; and reflections on his position as Creator and Ruler instead of removing, only make more manifest, this obligation. As long as we conceive God as sitting apart in supreme ease and self-satisfaction, he is not love at all, but only a reflex of our selfishness and vulgarity. As long as we conceive him as bestowing blessing upon us out of his infinite fullness, but at no real cost

to himself, he sinks below the moral heroes of our race. There is ever a higher thought possible until we see God taking the world upon his heart, entering into the fellowship of our sorrow, and becoming the supreme burden-bearer and the leader of all in self-sacrifice. Then only are the possibilities of grace and condescension and love and moral heroism filled up, so that nothing higher remains. And the work of Christ himself, so far as it was an historical event, must be viewed, not merely as a piece of history, but also as a manifestation of that cross which was hidden in the Divine love from the foundation of the world, and which is involved in the existence of the human world at all.

And is this all there is in the atonement? In reply, we say we no longer care to use the word

atonement, as it has become misleading or uncertain through long association with doubtful theological theories. But this is all there is in the work of Christ to which we can give articulate and tenable expression. If any one chooses, or feels a need for something more, it is open to him to say that there are back-lying mysteries in the Divine nature which transcend this view. To this we should have no objection, if we were allowed to add that they also transcend all the traditional views. These transcendental mysteries can not be expressed in terms of the satisfaction and substitution theories without contradicting our moral reason. They can not be expressed in terms of the governmental theory without impressing us with a sense of fiction. As we have before pointed out,

all these views oscillate between an untenable literalism in exegesis and a freer interpretation of the language of Scripture. Whoever departs from any of these views is reproached with departing from the teachings of Scripture. Thus the holder of the governmental view is charged with ignoring the teachings of the Word; and he in turn makes the same charge upon the holder of the moral and vital theory of the atonement. But in fact this is only an expression of their unclearness as to their own position. No one holds to a strictly literal interpretation of Scripture language, except when he has a polemic on hand, or wishes to make a charge of heresy. The satisfaction of the satisfactionist is one which does not satisfy. The substitution of the substitutionist is one which

does not substitute. The justice of the rectoral theory is unlike any justice recognized by the unsophisticated moral reason. The satisfaction and the substitution and the justice have to be manipulated until they mean what they may be allowed to mean according to the exigencies of the theory, but what no one would ever think they meant who relied solely on the ordinary usage of language.

It is, then, open to any one, as we have said, to hold that there are back-lying mysteries in the Divine nature which transcend the view we have set forth. Such a claim would be quite in line with our own insistence on the relative and adumbrative character of all our thinking on things Divine. But we must insist also, and once more, that these mysteries equally transcend all the

traditional views. They must be left unexpressed, therefore, beyond the point to which the view set forth carries us; and in any case this view must be included in any theory of the subject. It may be inadequate, but it is true as far as it goes. Whatever we may believe concerning super-ethical necessities in the case, they will never justify us in contradicting ethics. Theology may conceivably transcend the intuitions of conscience, but it may never contradict the enlightened conscience. The doctrine of the atonement, then, must be at least partially in the moral field, and all of it must be harmonious with the moral reason. No conception of God in this matter will do which puts him below the moral heroes of humanity, and even below the daily self-sacrifice of the family. No the-

ory will do which views God as without obligation, or as needing propitiation, or as being propitiated by a quantum of suffering. No abstract theory of the relation of abstract attributes, resulting in an abstract righteousness which leaves the living man as unrighteous as ever, with the necessity on the part of God either of letting man fall helplessly back into unrighteousness or of treating men as righteous when they are not—no such theory will longer command the thought and conscience of men; and for the sufficient reason that every such theory is at bottom irrational and immoral.

It must be noted, too, that the conception set forth has become practically the working view of the Church, so far as it is alive. We have come to see that the important thing is to save men from sin, and we are sure that conse-

quences will take care of themselves if this can be done. And in doing this we fall back on Christ's revelation of the Father, on his summons to repentance and discipleship and his promises of forgiveness and Divine renewal.

And if one should say, "Well, if that is all; if the sole work of Christ was to reveal the Father and bring men to God, what need was there for his life and sufferings and death?" the answer would be: How otherwise could the Father be effectively and dynamically revealed? Love is poorly revealed in words; it demands deeds for its true revelation. No proclamation of words, though attended by never so many miracles, no writing spread across the sky, could make any such living revelation of God and his character as is made in the in-



carnation and life of our Lord. And the revelation which he made derives its deep significance, not from what he said, nor from what he did, but from what he was. The incarnation is the central truth of Christianity; and the incarnation is the essential fact of the atonement. But instead of saying that this is all there is in the work of Christ, we should rather say, *All this* is in the work of Christ. And where, in earth or in heaven, is there anything great besides?

But where are our sins in the meantime? All that has been said at best seems to point only to the possibility of reformation, and does not look to the atonement for our past sins; yet this is the most important matter of all. This difficulty is partly fictitious, and in so far results from considering the subject from an

abstract forensic standpoint. The law claims our perfect obedience at all times, it is said ; and hence no later obedience can possibly atone for earlier disobedience. This, then, must always remain against us on the books of justice. How artificial all this is appears when we apply it to the case of the family. The father of the prodigal son, for instance, did not, after the feast was over, distress himself about the debt of filial duty which remained unpaid. And we may be sure that the Father in heaven will not unduly concern himself about the debt of the past when his prodigals return to their Father's house. To entertain such a notion is to leave the category of moral persons for that of things again. Love has no difficulty with the problem, and only love can solve it.

But still, we may say, there is a debt which remains even after forgiveness. This is true. Something indeed remains, but it is not well conceived as a debt to be paid in any commercial sense. It would be more exact to say that sinners, rather than sins, are forgiven. It is inverted and mechanical to fix our thought on the sin instead of the sinner. Nothing would be gained if all sins were forgiven and the evil will remained. This recalls our distinction between the moral displacence which must be visited upon the evil will and the natural consequences which result from its indulgence. The forgiveness of the sinner involves the removal of the former, but not of the latter. They are never forgiven so far as experience shows, and never ought to be forgiven. Of course, they do not remain as a set of

legal and forensic liabilities; but they remain as effects in a system of natural law. They can only be eliminated, as we have said, by bringing restorative influences into play. When the moral displacence of the Holy God is removed in the case of the repentant sinner, a great deal of work still remains to be done with reference to the past. And God presents himself as ready to co-operate with the sinner in working out a better future which shall in some measure undo the past and cut off its entail of evil. The utmost we can hope for is, that the system may be so ordered as to provide for recovery and for our undoing and eliminating the wrong and mischief that have gone forth from us. And this we ought supremely to desire. What sort of a moral being would he be who could rest content, even

in Abraham's bosom, if he knew there were anywhere any one suffering a hard and bitter lot because of his evil-doing? And what sort of a moral being would he be whose deepest desire was not to have a chance anywhere and anyhow to remedy every evil which had gone forth from him? Any permissible doctrine of forgiveness must be construed in accordance with these considerations. Otherwise, forgiveness itself becomes immoral, and the desire for forgiveness becomes an expression of the most abject selfishness.

Am I, then, never to get clear of my past? That depends on the meaning. Through the grace and gracious help of God I may get clear of the sinful life and emerge into the life of the spirit. The healing and restoring resources of God are great, and thus

I may hope at last to remove the scars and undo the evil. But that the past should be made non-existent, or memory blotted out, or the entail of consequences arbitrarily cut off, this is not to be hoped for, because it ought not to be. We can make new departures, but we must start from where we are. We can begin again, but never at the beginning. The past always has a mortgage on the future. This is self-evident as soon as we transfer the problem from the realm of fictitious or abstract forensic claims to the concrete world of organic law and consequence. And as this is the real world, we must adjust our theories and our hopes to it. Certainly, as we have said before, visible and experienced consequences are not forgiven; how, then, can we claim that any consequences will be for-

given, except in the sense of overcoming and eliminating them? Long, long regret must haunt many a forgiven soul; and there are sins against love and trust so dark and base that only the sight of Him of the pierced hands and the bleeding side persuades us they ever can be forgiven. Paul remembered his persecution of the Church unto the end of his life, calling himself the chief of sinners on that account, and saying that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief.

We reach, then, the following conclusions: All thought of literal substitution, satisfaction, payment of debt, is morally impossible. Forensic and governmental difficulties are fictitious except as modes of expression. Abstractions throw no light upon the real problem. The venue must

be changed from supposed enactments to natural laws; and from the evolutionary form of the moral life, judgment must be put at the end and not at the beginning. Then every one goes to his own place, to the place which he has chosen, and for which he has fitted himself. In this matter also there can be no arbitrary volition. What the eternal moral reason prescribes, that is what must finally be. Some of the earlier theorizers about justice, meaning thereby the moral reason, were not so much wrong in their contention as to its inexorable demands as they were in ignoring the fact of development and putting the demand at the wrong end. Meanwhile God has revealed himself in his Son as our Father, as bearing us upon his heart, and as supremely desirous of saving us from the sinful life



which must end in death if persisted in, and recovering us to righteousness and the filial spirit. For this the Divine Son has given himself; for this the Holy Spirit came and comes; and the work of both the Son and the Spirit roots in the Father's love. But in all this the aim is not to satisfy the demands of justice, nor yet to save men from penalty, but to save men from sinning, to lift them Godward, and to bring them to that spiritual attitude which will make it possible for God to bestow himself upon them in infinite and eternal blessing. As we have so often said, it is not a problem in forensic technicalities, but in spiritual dynamics.

Now, what shall we call this view? It is really no matter what we call it, provided the thing be understood; but the proper title is the moral view;

that is, the view which seeks to understand the Savior's work by the principles and analogies of the ethical realm rather than by those of the governmental and juristic realm. There is considerable criticism of what is called the "moral-influence theory" of the atonement scattered about in theological treatises, but it is superficial and unsatisfactory. The title itself is a bad one as failing to suggest the eternal love and eternal working which underlie the life and salvation of men, and of which the earthly work of the Redeemer is only a part, and, as it were, a sample. The Father worketh hitherto and I work, is as valid now as when it was first uttered. No theory which exhausts itself in anything so impersonal as an "influence" or an "example" will be very effective. But the title and the criticism

alike fail to grasp or express the depth and breadth of the true moral theory.

In the work of Christ the love and righteousness of God find their supreme revelation. Here we have the final illustration and demonstration of what God is and what he means for men. But here again it is easy for us to fall back once more into mechanical and juridical thinking. We may think of a store of merit acquired for men in which they are to share, so that nothing now remains but to bestow this merit upon men, puzzling ourselves meanwhile how the bestowment is made, and how it is conferred upon infants and imbeciles, and invincible ignorance, and those who never had a chance. The attempt to answer these questions has led to some highly artificial fancies and some very doubtful

inferences. First of all, we have the mechanical or magical application of this merit through the performance of some rite or utterance of some formula. Or we have a highly artificial scheme for saving the babies from the wrath of God and making them sharers in the benefits of the atonement. Or we have a set of doubtful inferences concerning future probation and what will take place there. Such notions are mainly mechanical solutions of mechanical difficulties generated by mechanical thinking; and they disappear when we think of the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus, and remember that it is this God and this Savior with whom we have to do. We need no theory to assure us that our race in all its members is safe in their hands. Jesus' revelation of the Father puts this

beyond doubt forever, and we must not allow mechanical theorizers to obscure the fact.

In this ethical and spiritual way the work of Christ which we call the atonement is to be understood. However much more we may put into it, in the way of ineffable mysteries, the features dwelt upon must not be left out. As an intelligible working theory they must form the gist of the doctrine. We must take the work of grace as a whole, and must note that its essential aim is to save men from sinning and to lift them into the life of the Spirit. With this understanding, we may retain the traditional language as a mode of expression, or as much of it as is adapted to modern Christian thought; but we must not turn it into a theological theory. This is the letter

that has killed, and still killeth. We must also note that in the better view the Divine love is not denied or diminished, but rather freed from obscuring misconceptions. Again, we must note that the way of life is the same it always has been. We must repent and forsake our sins, and become the disciples of the Lord Jesus, if we would enter into life. He is still our Redeemer, and the way by which we come to God. Whatever mystery there may be in the Savior's work, trust and discipleship are all that is needed for securing its benefits. This must be borne in mind in our preaching. Neither philosophy nor theology can save us. We must proclaim the love of God the Father, the gracious work of Christ the Son, the forgiveness of sins, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which Christ has

made known; and we must summon men to discipleship and obedience in his name. To do this is to preach the atonement in its practical significance, and to escape the intellectual and moral scandals with which theory has long burdened it.

These abstract and mechanical conceptions of the atonement have led to correspondingly abstract and mechanical conceptions of the closely-allied topics of salvation and faith, and especially of salvation by faith. For the full clearing up of our thought, it seems well to consider these subjects also, in the hope of reaching a concrete moral conception in line with our previous study and in harmony with the moral reason.

### Salvation by Grace

GRACE, not faith, is the deepest factor in our salvation. It is the grace of God on which everything else depends, and which gives value to everything else. Hence the formula given by St. Paul, "By grace are ye saved, through faith." Here grace is made fundamental, and faith is only instrumental or conditional. The salvation is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. It is not of our good and meritorious works, lest any man should boast. Grace, then, is the source of our salvation, and by faith we enter into it. This is a wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort; but this doctrine also when mechanically understood may become an intellectual and moral scandal.

First of all, it is clear that all finite beings, even the first-born



sons of light, stand only in the grace of God. They have nothing which has not been given them; they depend continuously upon God for their life and all their powers; and if they should estimate their value to God from the low standpoint of quantitative profit and loss, they could only say, "We are unprofitable servants." And that which is true of the first-born sons of light is truer still of the children of men. If we had kept all the commandments, we should still be unprofitable servants. And when to this we add our record of unfaithfulness, waywardness, wickedness, we see that we are not only unprofitable servants, but sinners also whose only hope must lie in the Divine grace.

Any value, then, which the world of finite spirits may have depends primarily and essen-

tially, not on the merit and worth of their service, but on the Divine love, in which they live and move and have their being. All we can do is to love and trust and obey; and the love of God does all the rest. It takes the will for the deed, and finds the sufficient service in love itself.

Such a relation is quite unintelligible on the plane of profit and loss, when coarsely estimated by the standard of things; but we understand it readily from the side of the family life. Profit and loss have no place here, but only the incommensurable relation of parental and filial love. A father does not value his child for what he can make out of it considered as a financial investment or speculation; he values it as his child. We are struck with horror and filled with indignation when we see the parental

relation degraded to the level of pecuniary standards. And the child, on the other hand, does not have its standing in the family because of the money value of its services, but because it is a child. It belongs to the family, and its great value is determined by its relation to parental affection. It is saved by love, not by works. And that which parental love supremely demands is filial love in return. The child may show forth the filial spirit, and live in answering affection, and parental love does all the rest. Nothing could be more odious than this relation when measured by pecuniary standards—a father wondering whether he will ever get back the money spent on the child, and a child unwilling to do anything unless it be paid; but nothing is more beautiful when interpreted in the light of

love. Then parental love takes the will for the deed, and thus gives all its value to the child's imperfect service; and then, in turn, finds in the answering filial love its own supreme and exceeding great reward.

This is the general form in which we must conceive the relation of God to all created spirits. Infinite love bestows, and finite love answers back. This relation is caricatured or degraded as soon as the element of profit and loss is introduced into it. The finite may never boast, for it receives everything from God. And the gifts of God are not rewards of merit, but expressions of fatherly affection.

And this which is true even of the highest orders of created spirits is pre-eminently true of men. For, as we have before pointed out, our life is one of development.

It is not a conscious moral life from the start, but a sub-moral, sub-rational, even animal life, which is to develop into moral and spiritual forms. The individual in his personal life develops slowly into intelligence, knowledge, and self-control; and the social development, which has such significance for the mental and moral life of the individual, is an age-long process. Account has to be taken of both orders of development in estimating the moral life of men. And in this upward movement, as in the family, there are long periods of irresponsiveness, ignorance, waywardness, thoughtlessness, with which love must bear, and out of which love must seek to bring its objects by all its resources of discipline and law and chastisement and self-revelation. And throughout this process men man-

ifestly stand, not in the value of their works, but in the great love wherewith God has loved them. To boast of their merits would be like an infant declaiming on the value of its services, or a learner of the alphabet priding himself on the greatness of his knowledge.

### Salvation

If there be any salvation, then, it must necessarily be of grace and not of debt. But salvation itself has often been mechanically, and even magically, conceived. The juristic and abstract conception of the atonement has led to a corresponding conception of salvation which still haunts much of our thinking. The Divine law is supposed to have a claim upon the individual or the whole race. This claim stands unsatisfied in the court of Divine

justice, much as a judgment stands on the books of an earthly court; and salvation consists in the satisfaction and cancellation of this claim. But Christian thought is fast outgrowing this conception of a legal and forensic relation, and replacing it by the thought of a vital, personal, and moral relation. The ideal relation between God and man is love from God above, and answering love and trust and obedience from man below. And if this relation does not exist or has been disturbed, man is so far forth lost. And the establishment or restoration of this relation is salvation. It is not a thing of abstract forensic or judicial character which may be mechanically secured, but a personal and moral relation. Its essence consists in a development or restoration of the filial spirit, a subordination of our lives

to the will of God, a loving recognition of God's loving will and presence in our lives. Any salvation which comes short of this is an abstract and non-moral thing which could satisfy neither God nor man.

The failure to grasp this fact of the moral nature and aim of salvation has led to a great many abstract or mechanical schemes. To begin with, the atonement was conceived as having furnished a satisfaction for sin, absolute or conditional; and individual salvation consisted in securing the juristic advantages of a share in this satisfaction. Or, and this was the more common conception of the matter, the atonement was conceived as having furnished a store of merit or righteousness which might be applied to the extinction of our demerit or unrighteousness; and



individual salvation consists in having a due share of this merit transferred to the individual account.

With this mechanical conception of the atonement and of salvation, it was only natural that correspondingly mechanical conceptions of the mode of securing salvation should arise. As salvation did not involve the personal love and loyalty of the spirit, but was only a quantitative balancing of claims in a court of abstract justice, it was entirely credible that it might be secured by almost any sort of mechanical rites or ceremonies performed by us, or for us, or upon us. Hence arose the scheme of sacerdotal proxyism, sacramentalism, and religious mechanism in general. The priest had mystical powers and the keys of heaven and hell. The sacraments were made sav-

ing ordinances, thus degenerating from a beautiful symbolism to the level of magical incantations. Then men betook themselves to meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, to all manner of external rites and ceremonies and mechanical exercises, and supposed that their due performance would secure salvation. And this was entirely logical. Salvation itself being external and mechanical, it might well be mechanically secured. Thus spiritual religion lost itself in unspiritual exercises which hid God from men, and kept men from God. From these aberrations Christian thought is returning only as it discovers the spiritual nature of salvation and the worthlessness of mechanism and proxies of whatever kind.

## Faith

That salvation must be of grace is manifest. We have now to consider the meaning and function of faith in the matter.

The doctrine of salvation by faith has played a great part in Christian history; and it is not entirely intelligible apart from the history. What gave it such epochal significance at the time of the Protestant Reformation was the errors against which it protested. The mechanical and external development of religion in the Christian Church had reached its climax at that time. The system of rites and ceremonies, of fasts and penances, which began innocently enough, had become a yoke which the people were unable to bear. The priestly class also claimed to have the keys of heaven and hell, and by this

means was enabled to exercise a dreadful tyranny over the minds of men. The system of indulgences debauched the Christian conscience, and purgatory with its allied doctrines made it possible to keep the living in abject terror concerning the dead. Good works, too, were largely mechanically conceived, and as such were without any spiritual character. Against all this the doctrine of salvation by faith was a revolt. It proclaimed the worthlessness of good works, and good works of the kind meant were worthless. Salvation, then, was not of works, but of God's grace through faith.

The doctrine also equally meant the direct access of the soul to God. No man or set of men or institution has the keys of heaven or hell. The moral relation between God and the soul is purely personal, and no third party may

interfere. This doctrine meant the overthrow of sacerdotalism with all that depended upon it. Thereafter the priest was no person with mystical powers for blessing or condemning men, but simply a person appointed by the Christian body for the proper administration of the spiritual services of the Church. On all these accounts the doctrine had epochal significance in the history and progress of Christian thought and life. Over against all mechanical good works, it proclaimed that salvation is by faith only. Over against all spiritual pride and self-sufficiency, it proclaimed that salvation is of grace. Over against all priestly or ecclesiastical assumption and usurpation, it proclaimed the direct access of the soul to God.

But it rarely happens that a great truth is clearly apprehended

in its essential meaning and just limitations from the start, and it certainly did not happen in this case. Both faith and good works were misconceived, and much confusion resulted. Owing partly to the quantitative and juristic conception of the atonement, faith was often viewed as mere intellectual assent to a doctrine, and was finally identified with dogmatic orthodoxy. We find this error even in the apostles' time; and St. James sharply criticises it by saying the devils have this faith. "Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble." Later on the error became still more pronounced and general, and constituted one of the great aberrations of theology, and a fruitful source of persecution. Of course, there is nothing morally saving in mere intellectual

assent; and this conception made salvation by faith an absurdity. What is there to save any one, or to transform character, in assenting to any dogmatic creed? Even if one understood them, which is not always the case, assenting to all the articles of the Athanasian Creed would save as little as assenting to the multiplication-table or a book of logarithms. As thus conceived, salvation by faith would be scarcely more than an idle fiction or meaningless hocus-pocus of words.

But all of this mistakes the doctrine. The faith that saves is no mere assent of the understanding; it is the practical surrender of ourselves to the revealed grace and will of God, according to the commands and promises of our Lord. Our trust in this Divine grace, our yielding ourselves up to it in obedience

and submission, is our faith. It is a moral act which includes trust, submission, obedience; and only as it includes them all is it saving faith. And that we can be truly saved—that is, lifted Godward, only in this way—is manifest. No mechanical rite or round can lift us, or has merit. We must trust in the grace above us, and submit ourselves to it, and we must struggle toward the ideal that grace holds out. The object of our trust may never be sought in ourselves, but only in the grace revealed from on high. However we stumble or fall, we must not abandon this trust and devotion. We can rise only as our eyes are fixed on the Infinite Goodness above us.

Understood in this way, salvation by faith is one of the deepest truths of religion. The faith



merits nothing; for it is grace which gives faith its value. But this faith is all we have, and, indeed, it is all that any finite spirit can have. And where this faith is, God can bestow himself upon us. We open our hearts and bid him come in. We bring ourselves to him to be made the temples for a Divine indwelling; and he receives us according to his word. To as many as thus receive him he gives power to become the children of God in the spirit. When faith is thus conceived we see that there can really be no other ethical and spiritual condition of salvation. All other conditions are mechanical and non-spiritual, and can never lift any soul Godward. But when faith is conceived as bare assent to any dogma whatever, instead of a living surrender to

God in reliance upon his grace, then it becomes unfruitful, if not immoral and pernicious.

### Good Works

The rejection of good works was likewise not clearly conceived, and this led to some disparagement of the doctrine. The one thing perfectly clear was that good works by machinery were worthless; that is, all performance of rite and ceremony of whatever kind which did not include, or which might be separated from, the living and loving surrender of heart and will to the love and service of God. All such works remain external to the soul, and count for nothing. They could never please God or lift a soul toward God. "My son, give me thine heart," is the supreme and all-inclusive demand from the Divine side, and the su-

preme and central duty from the human side. The rejection of mechanical good works is the first condition of spiritual religion.

But the doctrine was not so clear when it passed out of the mechanical into the moral field; and here misunderstanding arose. The desire to emphasize the opposition to Roman Catholic teaching was itself a source of aberration. Again, good works themselves in an ethical sense were superficially conceived, as if they might exist without any inner loyalty and devotion of heart. This was to confound morality with legality, and led to those dreary denunciations of "mere morality" and natural goodness as "filthy rags," which formed the staple of so much preaching a century ago. But, on the other hand, much that was passed off for morality

was only external conformity to outward law and custom, and was spiritually worthless. This difficulty disappears before a deeper insight into the true nature of morality. When it is seen that the supreme condition of true morality is the loyalty of heart and will to righteousness, it is plain that we need have no fear of good works in the moral sense; indeed, the more of them the better.

This difficulty arose partly from a fear of agreeing with the Catholic doctrine, partly from a superficial ethics, and partly from a fear of recognizing human goodness, lest the necessity of grace should seem to be diminished. A deeper and more rational source of the confusion in this matter lies in confounding the ethical side of life, which is based on our freedom, with the relig-

ious side, which is based on our dependence; and thus either the moral sense or the religious sense was violated. The religious sense in its feeling of reverence and dependence would ascribe everything good to God, and feels as irreverent any assumption of merit on the part of man. But the moral nature in its experience of freedom and responsibility insists on vindicating a place for virtue and merit in man also. The former by itself would find its limit in a powerless passivity, which would cancel humanity altogether. The latter by itself would easily pass into Pharisaism and spiritual pride. Out of the failure to recognize the existence and equal legitimacy of these opposite aspects of the spiritual life has arisen a great deal of unwisdom concerning the value of our good works.

The moral nature itself has a double aspect which, in a measure, runs parallel with these two antitheses. We may judge men by a double standard. If they are faithful to their light and possibility, we call them good on that account. Or we may compare them with our ideal of perfection, and then we find them imperfect, and hence condemned by the ideal. There is a similar dualism in our judgment of knowledge. If we judge a man's attainments by the standard of his time, by the acquirements of his fellows, by reference to his practical needs, we may well call him a wise man. But if we should judge with reference to perfect and completed knowledge, we should be unable to distinguish him from the fool; as all finite values and differences disappear when compared with the infinite.

In like manner when we judge men morally by the standard which obtains in their social environment and by the expectations which men justly form, we may accord them a high standard of goodness; and they might, as Job, maintain their integrity against all charges. But when we hold up our lives against the background of infinite holiness and perfection, the matter is altogether different; and the language which comes spontaneously to our lips is the prayer of the publican, "God, be merciful to us sinners." But these are only apparent contradictions. Both views are true according to our standpoint. There is such a thing as human merit, but all boasting is excluded before God.

In judging of human goodness we must always bear in mind this double point of view, not

denying the reality of human virtue on the one hand, nor falling into a shallow spiritual pride and self-conceit on the other. Language here is not to be viewed as the formulas of logic, but as the expression of life, emotion, religion; and it is to be understood only from that standpoint. The moral will must always assert itself, and thus distinguish between the good man and the bad. And the religious nature, in its sense of dependence and reverence, will always delight in viewing all our virtues and graces as the gift of God.

And this double need of our nature is best met by the doctrine of grace and faith. Our salvation is of grace, and not of debt. It is a gift of God, and not a reward of our meritorious works. But this salvation is through our faith, which is an active principle,



and which must issue in obedience, or it is not faith at all. We show and verify our faith by our works, and neither can exist in any moral sense without the other.

This is that salvation by faith which is the glory of the gospel, and which is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort. It is only the morally dull and blind who can be self-satisfied, as it is only the deeply ignorant who can boast of the greatness of their knowledge. In both realms the ideal grows faster than the actual, and ever condemns our utmost attainment. No strenuous conscientiousness, no faithfulness of service, can give us peace. For this we must be taken out of ourselves, and away from the contemplation of our own works, and made to gaze upon the infinite grace of God in which

alone we trust and by which alone we stand.

### Conclusion

Thus I have sought to relieve the doctrines of Divine grace from the verbal and mechanical misunderstandings which infest popular religious thought, and make the gospel itself a stumbling-block to many. In concluding I emphasize several points:

1. We must distinguish between the fact of the Savior's work and the theological theory of it. The latter is not of faith, but of speculation. Moreover, the fact is the essential thing; and the religious teacher must never allow any one to think he has abandoned the fact because he is dissatisfied with the theory.

2. We must note the instrumental and undogmatic character of Scripture language on this

subject, and the resulting necessity of taking it in a free and living way rather than as the language of a dogma or a statute. A person who reads the Scriptures with no aid but the dictionary, and without knowledge of ancient life and custom, and without diligently comparing Scripture with Scripture, will certainly go astray in this matter.

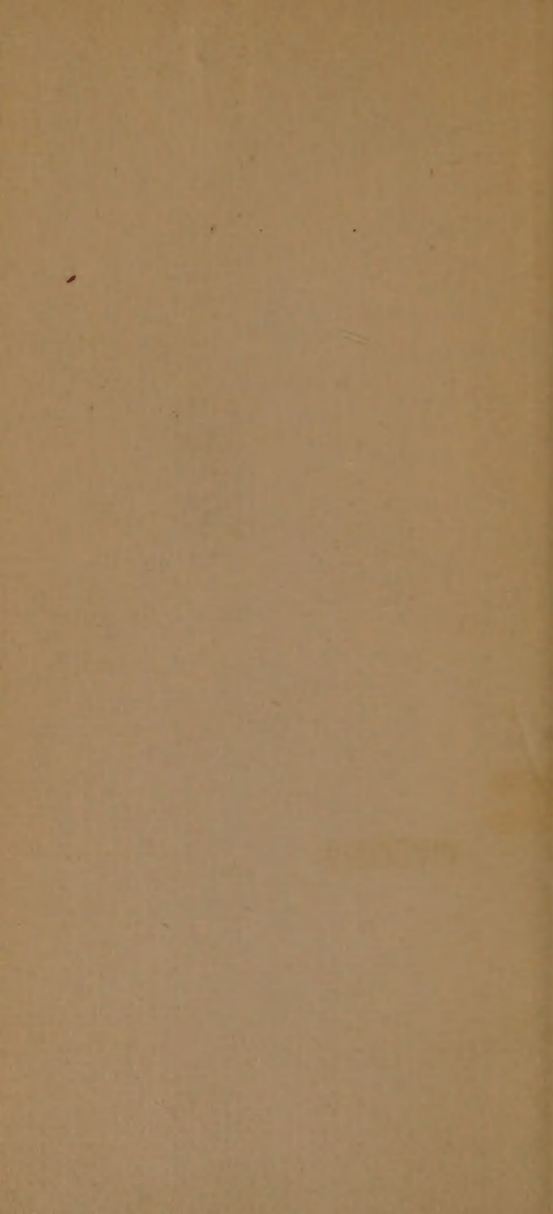
3. The doctrine itself must be brought out of the desert of abstract speculation, and be constructed and interpreted in the light of life and human experience. The ethical aim and aspect of the doctrine must be emphasized; and whatever conflicts therewith must be set aside. It is God's aim to save men from sin, not in sin; to save men from sin, not from penalty; to recover men to righteousness, not to plant them in heaven. Forgiveness

and salvation must be interpreted in accordance with this fundamental fact.

4. In religious instruction the teacher must put supreme emphasis on the fact of the Savior's work. He must proclaim the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and must summon men to discipleship in his name. This is practically the gist of the matter, and whatever attention we give to theory, we must never allow it to obscure this simple fact.

5. For practical purposes all we need is to become the disciples of our Lord, trusting in his promises and the Father whom he revealed. With this practical discipleship we shall receive all the benefits of the Savior's work without any theory; and without this discipleship we are lost, whatever our theory.





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